DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 333 661 EC 300 417

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|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Wood, Frank H.; And Others |
| TITLE | Conduct Disorders and Social Maladjustments: Policies, Politics, and Programming. Working with Behavioral Disorders: CEC Mini-Library. |
| INSTITUTION | Council for Exceptional Children, Reston, Va. |
| REPORT NO | ISBN-0-86586-197-8 |
| PUB DATE | 91 |
| NOTE | 36p.; For other documents in this set, see EC 300 409-416. |
| AVAILABLE FROM | Council for Exceptional Children, Publication Sales, 1920 Association Dr., Reston, VA 22091 ($8.90 each, $72.00 set of nine; members, $6.25 each, $50.00 set; stock no. P338). |
| PUB TYPE | Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC02 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | *Behavior Disorders; *Behavior Problems; Compliance (Legal); Definitions; Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Eligibility; Emotional Disturbances; Intervention; Program Development; Special Education; State Standards; *Student Evaluation; Teaching Methods |
| IDENTIFIERS | Education for All Handicapped Children Act; Iowa; Nevada |

ABSTRACT

This booklet reviews the literature and examines issues associated with providing services to students who exhibit externalizing or acting-out behaviors in the schools. Considered are the following issues: eligibility (whether socially maladjusted or conduct-disordered students are eligible for special education); legal intent (intent of the definition in Public Law 94-142); assessment (how assessment data are used); programming (the possible lack of value in special education for students with some behavior disorders); exclusion (initiatives to exclude from special education students with disabilities who have conduct disorders); Iowa state policy (which differentiates between students with conduct disorders and those with other emotional and behavioral disorders); and Nevada state policy (which differentiates between students with "serious emotional handicap" who are eligible for services and students with "conduct disorder or social maladjustment" who are excluded from special education services). General guidelines for working with aggressive students with emotional and behavioral disorders are given and include providing clear structure of expectations for student behavior with rewards for compliance and some degree of punishing consequence for noncompliance. Includes 64 references. (DB)

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# Conduct Disorders and Social Maladjustments:

## Policies, Politics, and Programming

Frank H. Wood, Christine O. Cheney,
Daniel H. Cline, Kristina Sampson,
Carl R. Smith, and Eleanor C. Guetzloe

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Published by The Council for Exceptional Children

3

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Conduct disorders and social maladjustments : policies, politics, and programming / Frank H. Wood ... [et al.].
p. cm.
"CEC mini-library."
"Working with behavioral disorders."
Includes bibliographical references (p. ).
ISBN 0-86586-197-8
1. Behavioral disorders in children—United States. 2. Problem children—Education—United States. 3. Socially handicapped children—Education—United States. 4. Special education—United States. I. Wood, Frank H. (Frank Henderson), 1929-
II. Council for Exceptional Children.
LC4802.C66 1991
371.93—dc20 91-11845
CIP

ISBN 0-86586-197-8

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Stock No. P338

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Printed in the United States of America
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# Contents

**Foreword, v**

**Introduction, 1**

1. **Eligibility, 3**
   *Opposing positions have been taken on whether students described as socially maladjusted or conduct disordered are eligible for special education services.*

2. **Legal Intent, 5**
   *Policy issues revolve around the intent of the definition in P.L. 94-142, program costs, and the possible desire on the part of some to exclude students who exhibit certain types of disturbing behaviors from education services.*

3. **Assessment, 8**
   *Assessment issues are concerned with how assessment data will be used.*

4. **Programming, 9**
   *Programming issues question the value of special education for students who exhibit certain kinds of behaviors.*

5. **Exclusion, 10**
   *There have been a number of legal initiatives to exclude from special education students with disabilities who have disruptive behavior—those with "conduct disorders."*

6. **State Policy: Iowa, 12**
   *For purposes of programming, Iowa differentiates between students with conduct disorders and those with other emotional and behavioral disorders.*

**7. State Policy: Nevada, 16**

*Nevada differentiates between "serious emotional handicap"—students who are provided with special education under P.L. 94–142—and "conduct disorder or social maladjustment"—students who are excluded from special education services.*

**8. General Guidelines, 21**

*The general approach favored for working with aggressive students with emotional and behavioral disorders calls for clear structure of expectations for student behavior with rewards for compliance and some degree of punishing consequence for noncompliance.*

**References, 23**

# Foreword

## Working with Behavioral Disorders CEC Mini-Library

One of the greatest underserved populations in the schools today is students who have severe emotional and behavioral problems. These students present classroom teachers and other school personnel with the challenges of involving them effectively in the learning process and facilitating their social and emotional development.

The editors have coordinated a series of publications that address a number of critical issues facing service providers in planning and implementing more appropriate programs for children and youth with severe emotional and behavioral problems. There are nine booklets in this Mini-Library series, each one designed for a specific purpose.

- *Teaching Students with Behavioral Disorders: Basic Questions and Answers* addresses questions that classroom teachers commonly ask about instructional issues, classroom management, teacher collaboration, and assessment and identification of students with emotional and behavioral disorders.
- *Conduct Disorders and Social Maladjustments: Policies, Politics, and Programming* examines the issues associated with providing services to students who exhibit externalizing or acting-out behaviors in the schools.
- *Behaviorally Disordered? Assessment for Identification and Instruction* discusses systematic screening procedures and the need for functional assessment procedures that will facilitate provision of services to students with emotional and behavioral disorders.

- *Preparing to Integrate Students with Behavioral Disorders* provides guidelines to assist in the integration of students into mainstream settings and the delivery of appropriate instructional services to these students.
- *Teaching Young Children with Behavioral Disorders* highlights the applications of Public Law 99–457 for young children with special needs and delineates a variety of interventions that focus on both young children and their families.
- *Reducing Undesirable Behaviors* provides procedures to reduce undesirable behavior in the schools and lists specific recommendations for using these procedures.
- *Social Skills for Students with Autism* presents information on using a variety of effective strategies for teaching social skills to children and youth with autism.
- *Special Education in Juvenile Corrections* highlights the fact that a large percentage of youth incarcerated in juvenile correctional facilities has special learning, social, and emotional needs. Numerous practical suggestions are delineated for providing meaningful special education services in these settings.
- *Moving On: Transitions for Youth with Behavioral Disorders* presents practical approaches to working with students in vocational settings and provides examples of successful programs and activities.

We believe that this Mini-Library series will be of great benefit to those endeavoring to develop new programs or enhance existing programs for students with emotional and behavioral disorders.

*Lyndal M. Bullock*
*Robert B. Rutherford, Jr.*

# Introduction

Research has indicated that without treatment the long-term outcomes for students who display extreme aggressive, acting-out, and antisocial behaviors are very poor. These behaviors tend to persist over time, and as students displaying them get older, they are more likely than their age peers to be unemployed, incarcerated, or in mental hospitals (Quay, 1986; Robins, 1979). However, these students are extremely difficult to educate in the regular classroom. Their behavior provokes emotional reactions ranging from anger and rejection to despair and emotional exhaustion. At first glance, many of these students appear to qualify for special education; that is, they fail to make satisfactory educational progress because of their behavior.

The present federal definition of "seriously emotionally disturbed," however, contains a sentence whose meaning is debated by special educators: "The term [seriously emotionally disturbed] does not include children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they are seriously emotionally disturbed" [34 *Code of Federal Regulations* (CFR), Sec. 300.5b8]. Several differing interpretations of this sentence have been offered.

One interpretation focuses on ambiguity in the meaning of "socially maladjusted" to justify exclusion of many students with aggressive, acting-out, and conduct-disordered behavior. The undefined group of students declared ineligible because they are "socially maladjusted" but not emotionally disturbed are declared to be those who would be classified as "conduct disordered" in the classification system of *DSM–III* (American Psychiatric Association, 1980). Special educators who offer this interpretation believe that large numbers of students currently served in special programs for students with emotional and behavioral disorders are not eligible for service because they have conduct disorders, and thus fall into the excluded category, "socially maladjusted."

A second group of special educators acknowledges that although there are some students who are socially maladjusted but not emotionally disturbed [e.g., the subgroup of students with conduct disorders described as "socialized aggressive" (Center, 1990)], most students currently served because of their acting-out behavior are eligible for special education services. To these educators, the exclusion of such a large group of students runs contrary to the intent of Congress to educate all students failing to make satisfactory progress because of their disabilities, as expressed in P.L. 94–142 and confirmed by court decisions. These educators prefer to make decisions about eligibility and placement on the basis of student educational needs rather than diagnostic categories that have been shown to have limited relevance for education.

A third group of educators argues that the second position does not go far enough. To these educators, the drafters of the excluding language about the socially maladjusted in the current definition were naive. No one has demonstrated reliable, valid procedures for distinguishing students with social maladjustments from those with emotional and behavioral disorders. Socially maladjusted students who are failing to make satisfactory progress in school should receive special education as needed without quibbling about whether or not they fit into diagnostic categories that were developed for other purposes. These educators regard much of the present discussion as merely a word game. Assessment efforts, they believe, should be directed primarily at individualizing placement and programming decisions rather than splitting hairs about eligibility.

While those who favor the exclusion of students with social maladjustment appear satisfied with the language of the present federal definition, those special educators in the second and third groups favor elimination of the ambiguous terminology in the present definition.

The authors of this book believe that the second group of educators are closer to accurately interpreting the meaning of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act for the education of students with emotional and behavioral disorders than those who would exclude students with social maladjustment but not emotional disturbance.

The authors also believe that the third group of educators, those who decry attempts to exclude any group of students who appear to need special education regardless of the labels that may be applied to them, is close to the spirit of that legislation. Avoiding the responsibility of providing for the education of students failing to make satisfactory educational progress because of their emotional and behavioral condition will increase the ultimate cost to society of managing their problem behavior. In addition, such avoidance constitutes the abandonment of young people who might respond to appropriate special education and related services. The alternative programs provided for students with conduct problems in Nevada, which are similar to special education programs

provided for such students in other states, have shown encouraging results. The continuation of these programs is at risk, not because they are ineffective, but because they are not mandated under special education laws. All evidence seems to indicate that appropriate programming, rather than exclusion from special education services, is the answer to meeting the educational needs of students described as acting out, conduct disordered, and socially maladjusted.

## 1. Eligibility

***Opposing positions have been taken on whether students described as socially maladjusted or conduct disordered are eligible for special education services.***

Two opposing positions have been taken on this issue. Some educators contend that many students currently being served in programs for students with emotional and behavioral disorders are *not* eligible if the definition of "seriously emotionally disturbed" in the federal regulations is appropriately interpreted. (The term *emotional and behavioral disorders* is used here to refer to the group of students labeled "seriously emotionally disturbed" in P.L. 94–142. This label suggests the complexity of these students' behavioral symptoms and the disturbed thoughts and feelings that accompany and/or contribute to those symptoms.) To understand their position, let's look closely at the language in the federal definition.

The current federal definition of *seriously emotionally disturbed*, the federal term for students with emotional and behavioral disorders, states:

> The term means a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time or to a marked degree, which adversely affects educational performance:
>
> (a) An inability to learn which cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors;
>
> (b) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers;
>
> (c) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances;
>
> (d) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or

(e) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

The term includes children who are schizophrenic. *The term does not include children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they are seriously emotionally disturbed.* (34 *CFR*, Sec. 300.5b8. Emphasis added.)

The five basic clusters of characteristics were taken from a definition developed by Bower (1960). The developers of the federal definition then added the language about academic performance, children who are schizophrenic, and children who are socially maladjusted. Autism was originally included as a condition related to serious emotional disturbance, but in 1980 this label was removed from the definition and listed as a disability under the general classification of "other health impaired."

The federal label and definition are advisory, rather than mandatory. Each state has the option of using the federal label and definition or adopting its own label and definition, provided that the state label and definition do not depart significantly from the federal models. The result has been a plethora of different labels and definitions (see Epstein, Cullinan, & Sabatino, 1977: National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 1978; White, Beattie, & Rose, 1985). The present controversy must be viewed in the context of the considerable latitude the states have been allowed for their interpretation of the language in the federal definition.

Educators who oppose the provision of special education services for students with conduct disorders argue that they are the group referred to in the federal definition as "socially maladjusted" and who are not also seriously emotionally disturbed. Some, like Kelly (1988), maintain that such students choose to behave disruptively in schools and should be held accountable for their behavior. In states or school districts where this view has been accepted, some students previously being served have been "decertified," that is, declared ineligible for special education services; and others who would previously have been considered eligible have been denied those services. This view has been supported by several state education agencies, several state associations of school psychologists, and some local school districts, as well as by some individual special educators. Examples from Nevada are described later in this book.

At present, most special educators of students with emotional and behavioral disorders reject this exclusionary position, maintaining that most students with conduct disorders *are* eligible under the current definition. They believe that the variety of problems presented by subgroups of students with emotional and behavioral disorders requires differential placement and programming. Students with conduct

disorders have historically been considered part of the group called "seriously emotionally disturbed" in federal law and regulations. The challenge they present requires appropriate placement and programming, rather than exclusion from service. Decertification or exclusion of these students constitutes a violation of their rights to an appropriate education. This interpretation has been supported by the Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders (1987, 1990) and the Council of Representatives of the American Psychological Association (1989).

A subgroup of this second group of special educators accepts the idea that there may indeed be some students who are "socially maladjusted but not seriously emotionally disturbed" and thus are ineligible under the present definition. These educators have called for revision of the present federal definition so as to drop the excluding language entirely. Statements that address this concern include those by Neel and Rutherford (1981) and Nelson and Rutherford (1990). The position paper of the Council for Children with Behavior Disorders (1987) also calls for revision of the present definition.

This debate has ceased to be of purely academic concern. Several states have moved to reorganize their special education services to exclude students they define as ineligible because their behavior is considered "disturbing" but not "disturbed." Our discussion focuses on the issues tied most closely to interpretations of the present definition, laying aside as much as possible the related topic of a possible revision of the federal definition itself.

The major contributor to this section was Frank H. Wood.

## 2. Legal Intent

***Policy issues revolve around the intent of the definition in P.L. 94–142, program costs, and the possible desire on the part of some to exclude students who exhibit certain types of disturbing behaviors from education services.***

One important issue for policy research concerns the intent of Congress at the time the federal definition was adopted. The general intent of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (P.L. 94–142 or EHA), as interpreted by the courts, was to ensure that no student with a disability be denied the special services necessary to ensure educational progress. The Supreme Court provided a judicial interpretation of congressional intent in *Board of Education v. Rowley* (1982). In Justice Rehnquist's opinion in that case, the intent of Congress in P.L. 94–142 was "to bring previously excluded handicapped children into the public education systems of the States and to require the States to adopt proce-

dures which would result in individualized consideration of and instruction of each child" (458 U.S. 189). The "basic floor of opportunity provided by the Act consists of access to specialized instruction and related services which are individually designed to provide educational benefit to the handicapped child" (458 U.S. 201). Access to and benefit from education are the key criteria.

If this is the general intent of the law, one of the first policy issues to be considered must be a search for reasons that educational policymakers would wish to exclude from service any group of students with a high incidence of failure to make satisfactory progress and complete regular school programs. There are a number of possibilities to consider.

One possible reason is the cost of implementing the congressional mandate. The anxiety of local school districts and state education agencies about the rising cost of providing appropriate special education for students with disabilities has been compounded by frustration at the failure of Congress to appropriate sufficient funds to cover what had originally been proposed as the federal share of the expense. Thus, though not stated explicitly, a possible motivation for seeking to exclude students with conduct disorders from special education services by declaring them ineligible is a desire to escape the cost of providing those services. If one wished to reduce services by excluding students, where would one find a more likely target group than those whose acting-out behavior makes them highly unpopular with teachers and many peers?

A more frequently stated reason, the wish to provide differentiated programming for students with conduct disorders, could be accomplished without excluding any students from service, so it is unlikely that this can be a sole or primary motive.

A third possible reason for excluding this group of students from special education services might be a desire to punish through exclusion students whose behavior is frequently disruptive and offensive to teachers and fellow students (Mullen & Wood, 1986). *Honig v. Doe* (1988) affirms the right of students with emotional and behavioral disorders to receive special education services without being excluded because of behavior related to that disability. If students displaying certain types of disturbing behavior are declared to be without disabilities, they are no longer protected from exclusion from school. Some proponents of excluding students with conduct disorders are quite direct in acknowledging this as a reason, stating their belief that such students will be responsible for their behavior once strong consequences for inappropriate behavior are applied to them (Kelly, 1988).

The language of the definition makes it clear that *some group of students was regarded by those who drafted it as ineligible for special education services.* What group did they have in mind? Some researchers hold that the term *socially maladjusted* in the present definition is not interpretable,

and that the excluding languages violates the sense of the rest of the definition. Among those expressing this view is Bower (1982), from whose earlier definition most of the language for the present definition was taken. Adherents of this viewpoint argue that since "the definition of the socially maladjusted is vague and open ended" (Neel & Rutherford, 1981, p. 79), *any student failing to make satisfactory progress in school because of emotional or behavioral disorder, however expressed in behavior, should be given special education services* (Nelson & Rutherford, 1990).

What concerns led the members of Congress charged with developing legislation to provide for the educational needs of students with disabilities to adopt the present language? It is important to keep in mind that the group excluded is not the socially maladjusted per se, but the socially maladjusted who are not also seriously emotionally disturbed. Indeed, social maladjustment is a generic characteristic of students with emotional and behavioral disorders, and a concern for appropriate special education of students who are socially maladjusted predates the passing of P.L. 94–142 by at least 25 years. For example, the 1950 Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, *The Education of Exceptional Children*, includes a chapter describing special educational programs for students who are "socially maladjusted," but there is no chapter on the education of students with behavioral or emotional disorders. In the Yearbook, Stullken (1950) wrote, "This chapter is concerned primarily with those who are so severely maladjusted that they need special education services either in special groups or in the form of guidance from especially trained personnel in addition to that given by regular teachers" (p. 238). Those who argue that the drafters of the present definition intended to exclude all students with social maladjustment must explain why the Congress would wish to exclude from EHA protection a large group of students who historically had been recognized as in need of special services. The express purpose of the EHA was to ensure a right to an appropriately adapted and supported education to students who, because of their disabilities, are not making satisfactory educational progress in their current placements.

Most educators who propose to exclude students with conduct disorders appear to depart from historical practice. They focus solely on the language of the definition, arguing that "socially maladjusted" means "conduct disordered" or "behaviorally disordered" and that these groups are excluded from service because they are not seriously emotionally disturbed. Clarizio (1987) noted that the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM–III)* (American Psychiatric Association, 1980; revised 1987), a widely used classification system, establishes the basis for the differentiation by distinguishing between conduct disorders and anxiety disorders in its taxonomy. Clarizio then stated, without supporting citations from the American Psychiatric Association, that *conduct disorders* is "a term that overlaps substantially with social malad-

justment" (1987, p. 238). Going further, he stated that social maladjustment is defined by the conduct disorder ("unsocialized aggression," according to Clarizio) and socialized aggression factors of rating scales such as the Behavior Problem Checklist (Quay & Peterson, 1979). Similarly, Slenkovich (1988), a lawyer specializing in special education law, has asserted strongly that public schools are not obligated to provide special education services to students who are socially maladjusted, a classification she also regards as synonymous with conduct disordered.

Center (1990) might be considered representative of the more moderate group who believe that it is possible to provide a meaningful interpretation of the present definition without going to such an extreme position. Center accepted the contention that there is a group of students who should be excluded because they are socially maladjusted without being seriously emotionally disturbed. Through thoughtful discussion of the varying degrees of exclusiveness versus inclusiveness implicit in differing interpretations of the meaning of the present federal definition, he sought to clarify the meaning of this troublesome phrase. Center's position is that, "in terms of *DSM III–R* categories, this [excluded socially maladjusted group] would include *only* the 'group type' of conduct disorder (formerly, the socialized aggressive and socialized nonaggressive subtypes in *DSM III*)" (Center, 1990). (Words in parentheses are Center's.)

Because the policymakers' intent is not clear from the language of the definition, and a binding interpretation has not been offered by the courts, there is no simple way to arbitrate the differences in policy and programming for students that result from the very different interpretations of what is meant by "socially maladjusted but not seriously emotionally disturbed." Careful examination of the records by policy researchers may help in the resolution of this issue. The case law record on this matter is still limited primarily to isolated decisions by hearing officers. As the case law record develops, court interpretation of congressional intent should be clarified. Reviews of court decisions that examine all sides of the issue, rather than citation of those that appear to provide some support for a partisan position, are also much needed. Such a review of case law and committee records is presented later in this book.

## 3. Assessment

***Assessment issues are concerned with how assessment data will be used.***

Policy issues are more salient than assessment issues in the current debate. The disagreements concern the use to be made of assessment

data, rather than whether it is possible to find procedures that will separate students into groups labeled "conduct disordered" versus "other emotionally and behaviorally disordered."

As already mentioned, "conduct disorders," which may or may not be the same thing as "social maladjustment," are classified as a mental disorder in the widely used *DSM–III* taxonomy. A factor variously labeled "acting out," "conduct disorder," or "externalizing" is commonly reported from factor analyses of behavior rating scales (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1979; Kazdin, 1987; Luebke, Epstein, & Cullinan, 1987; Walker et al., 1988). The majority of students referred for possible placement or served in public school programs for students with emotional and behavioral disorders score high on scales based on this externalizing or conduct-disorder factor (Cullinan, Epstein, & Kauffman, 1984; Epstein, Kauffman, & Cullinan, 1985; Smith, Wood, & Grimes, 1988; Walker et al., 1988). Researchers also agree that some students show "mixed" behavior profiles, with significantly elevated scores on both externalizing and internalizing scales (Achenbach & Edelbrock; Clarizio, 1987; Walker et al., 1988) but estimates of their number vary.

There is no evidence that developers of the most widely used screening procedures or rating scales expected that their procedures/scales would be used to classify any group of students as "socially maladjusted but not seriously emotionally disturbed." Only those who are interested in applying these assessment tools, or modified versions of them, for this purpose appear to be justifying such use (Clarizio, 1987; DeYoung, 1984; Tibbetts, Pike, & Welch, 1986).

Finally, is it productive to focus this much effort on subtle issues of classification and eligibility? Sinclair, Forness, and Alexson (1985) conducted a careful study of the relationship between psychiatric classification and educational placement. They found relatively little relationship. Unless the educational utility of finer diagnostic classifications can be demonstrated, effort directed in this direction would appear to be largely wasted.

## 4. Programming

***Programming issues question the value of special education for students who exhibit certain kinds of behaviors.***

As the 1950 review chapter by Stullken demonstrates, there is a long history of special programming for students with acting-out, aggressive behavior problems associated with emotional disturbance. Many such students are accommodated successfully in programs for students with

other disabilities, including those with other types of behavior problems. Such programs have been at least as successful as other special education programs. In 1982 Sabatino summarized the results of selected evaluation studies of alternative programs for troubled, aggressive youth as follows:

> Generally, then, alternative programs can claim academic achievement similar to that of traditional programs. Truancy is curbed dramatically; the dropout rate is generally reduced by up to one-third.
>
> How successful are the students in returning to home school? The return rate to regular programs is approximately one-fourth of the alternative population, with another one-fourth to one-half completing the alternative program. (1982, p. 11)

More recently, Makin (1987) concluded, from a study of transitions from special programs to regular programs that programs that currently serve students with serious emotional disturbance may be more effective with students with conduct disorders than with those having the "clinical diagnoses" of schizophrenia, depression, and similar mental disorders. Makin's analysis showed that a diagnosis of conduct disorder was one of the variables related to successful transition from special school placement to a less restrictive environment.

As with all educational interventions, programs for students with special needs because of behavior problems and emotional disturbance need evaluation and improvement, but there is nothing in the record of work with students with conduct disorders to suggest that they benefit less from special programming than other students with special needs.

## 5. Exclusion

***There have been a number of legal initiatives to exclude from special education students with disabilities who have disruptive behavior—those with "conduct disorders."***

Embodied in EHA are numerous congressional goals and assumptions, the centerpiece being that *all* children with disabilities are to receive a free, *appropriate* education (and that no children *without* disabilities were through error to end up in a special education program). The assumptions were that:

1. An elaborate set of procedural mechanisms would achieve this substantive right to an appropriate education;

2. An operational environment existed in which relatively few referral and assessment errors would occur (or would be screened out by better personnel training and assessment procedures);
3. Educators would not on their own maximize the potential of each child but Individualized Educational Program (IEP) procedures would, given parent involvement and due process protections;
4. A due process provision would lead to more systematic pressure on school systems, put handicapped children on an educational par with their nonhandicapped peers, lead to uniformity of treatment and result in a general pattern of compliance with the law. (Clune & Van Pelt, 1985).

The history of implementation of the EHA reveals that these assumptions were often met only partially in practice. Patterns of service vary among states, within states, and among school districts. Policy choices made by administrators affect the type of service offered, who receives it, and on what terms it is given. Particularly severe disparities exist in access to special education for students with emotional and behavioral disorders.

Article VI, Section 2, of the U.S. Constitution, known as the "Supremacy Clause," establishes the principle that state law is subservient to federal law when the latter is designed to secure constitutional protections for an affected group of citizens or to legislate for a purpose that Congress deems to be in the national interest. With regard to the education of students with emotional and behavioral disorders, the Supreme Court consistently has struck down state or local eligibility policies that conflict with federal rules, declaring that such policies violate the Supremacy Clause. The decision in *Honig v. Doe* (1988), overturning a lower court ruling, provides a recent example. Like all federal agencies, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) operates on the assumption that federal authority is superior to state authority, and by analogy, that OSEP's interpretation of the meaning of federal statutes and related rules takes precedence over conflicting interpretations by state legislatures and agencies. In a recent ruling on a Colorado policy (OSEP, 1988), OSEP staff stated, "We also concluded that at least some of the characteristics of an 'emotional or behavioral disorder' in the Colorado regulations were suspect as being inconsistent with the federal definition. . . . While the regulations leave open the possibility that students who are not eligible under the federal definition are eligible under the state's regulations, the [state] statute raises the additional issue of children who are eligible under the federal standard being excluded by the state's [definition]" (p. 213:131). Thus, when there

is a conflict, the federal agencies charged with monitoring implementation clearly expect that the courts will uphold their interpretations. To date, neither OSEP nor a federal court has issued an opinion on the relationship of conduct disorders to social maladjustment as defined in the federal definition.

The history of early special education legislation reveals a struggle for compromise between legislators who favored a program serving every child in conflict and distress with special education needs and those who sought a definition that would exclude from service students who were norm violators by choice rather than through the effects of a disability. This compromise, as embodied in P.L. 88–164, more clearly reflects legislative intent than the language in the regulations guiding the implementation of P.L. 94–142. *If congressional intent had been more accurately reflected in the regulations now in force, the exclusionary clause would read: "The term does not include juvenile delinquents unless it is determined that they are unable to integrate into the school or community due to serious intra- or interpersonal maladjustment."*

Now, nearly three decades later, some school officials wish to interpret the "exclusion" section of the present definition in a way that justifies the exclusion of students with "conduct disorders." This interpretation is not supported by this review of the history of the present terminology and definition. Such a narrow, restrictive definition of the term *seriously emotionally disturbed* was never proposed. According to Dr. Edwin Martin, former Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services and a senior member of the congressional staff during the 1960s (Edwin Martin, personal communication, May 26, 1989), the intent was to exclude "the hubcap stealers." In the light of all the evidence on congressional intent, state or local policies that earmark students with conduct disorders for exclusion from statutory protections under federal law appear vulnerable if brought forward for judicial or administrative review.

The major contributor to this section was Daniel H. Cline, 1990.

## 6. State Policy: Iowa

***For purposes of programming, Iowa differentiates between students with conduct disorders and those with other emotional and behavioral disorders.***

In 1974 the Iowa Legislature passed new special education legislation that contained components similar to those later contained in P.L. 94–142. In the *Iowa Rules of Special Education* (Iowa Department of Public Instruction, 1974), the following definition was put in place:

> Children who are chronically disruptive refers to those pupils who, due to marked personal, school, family or community adjustment problems, have been excluded from school, are under judicial jurisdiction and require a self-contained special class program.

These students considered "chronically disruptive" were differentiated from a separate category of students labeled "emotionally disabled." According to information supplied by the Iowa Department of Public Instruction (Smith, 1976):

> Chronically disruptive students do not have neurotic or psychotic behaviors which interfere with their day-to-day adjustment and prevent their maintenance in any satisfactory interpersonal relationships. These students are more like those students typically referred to as socially maladjusted.

In 1977 Iowa revised its procedures for assessing the eligibility of students considered chronically disruptive. The revisions clarified the process by which such students might be excluded from school, required documentation of attempts to modify the regular education program before any referral for special education, and required that appropriate juvenile agencies be involved in the diagnostic-educational staffing of students considered chronically disruptive (Iowa Department of Public Instruction, 1977). Information calling for differentiation between these students and those with emotional disabilities was distributed to local schools. A consultant for the Iowa Department of Public Instruction stated:

> One of the most difficult tasks facing us is to differentiate the population known as "chronically disruptive" from the handicapped population referred to as "emotionally disabled." . . . "Why is it important to differentiate between these two populations?" The two major reasons I see . . . are 1) the unique educational applications associated with each of these populations and 2) the effects each group may have on the other. (Smith, 1977, p. 2)

Today, Smith and the other authors of the Iowa plan feel that the effort to develop a systemwide differential diagnostic approach separating these two groups was a mistake. There were a number of less-than-positive outcomes. By the late 1970s, despite a number of attempts at providing information on the programming needs for such students, Iowa schools had developed fewer than 25 program statewide for students labeled "chronically disruptive." All of these programs were

based on a restrictive, self-contained model. Problems in differential diagnosis persisted.

In reflecting on the experience of these years, Smith stated:

> On the basis of these experiences, I have reached several conclusions. First, I believe that it is *not* possible, on a system-wide basis, to reliably differentiate those students who are emotionally disturbed from those who have traditionally been referred to as socially maladjusted. While some diagnosticians may be particularly gifted in differentiating between these two groups, it is not possible, in my opinion, to assure such competence across all the diagnosticians within a particular system. This differentiation is largely based on the interpretation of a particular student's *intent* at the time of the alleged misbehavior. For this reason I have, for the last several years, advocated for the use of terms such as behavioral disorders that lead diagnosticians to focus on the behavior of concern rather than speculating as to the internal dynamics leading to such behavior. While a sensitivity to such dynamics is certainly desirable, it is not possible, in my opinion, to base eligibility decisions solely on such perceptions. (Smith, 1982)

In 1980 the Iowa Department of Public Instruction proposed to the Iowa Legislature the adoption of the term *behavioral disorders* to replace both the terms *emotional disability* and *chronically disruptive*. This proposal was presented to the legislature for 3 years before being discussed and passed during the 1983 legislature session. The rationale for the proposal as explained by Smith (1982) in testimony before the Iowa General Assembly was that the term *behavioral disorders* (a) was a more accurate overall term to describe these students, (b) was less derogatory than terms such as *emotional disabilities* and *chronically disruptive*, and (c) would facilitate more specific identification procedures.

With the passage of this legislation (Iowa House File 133), the Department of Public Instruction began an intensive effort to develop a definition of behavioral disorders. In 1981, 2 years before the final approval of the change in terminology, a preliminary proposal for the definition had been distributed to school districts to encourage discussion. Using this draft definition as a base, work was begun on the development of a new definition immediately following the passage of the legislative proposal. A task force, including representatives from special education administration, school psychology, and instructional services, was convened to consider input from a variety of sources, including an outside consultant. In June 1983 a draft definition was submitted to the Iowa Legislature for review. The definition received

final approval by a legislative committee in late September and went into effect November 30, 1983.

The definition describes four behavioral clusters, as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Cluster I | Significantly deviant, aggressive or impulsive behaviors; |
| Cluster II | Significantly deviant, withdrawn or anxious behaviors; |
| Cluster III | Significantly deviant thought processes manifested with unusual communication or behavioral patterns or both; and |
| Cluster IV | Significantly deviant behavior patterns characterized by deficits in cognition, communication, sensory processing or social participation or a combination thereof which may be referred to as autistic behavior. |

The presence of any one of these four clusters is considered indicative of behavioral disorder, that is, emotional and behavioral disorder. Implementation procedures require the use of an interdisciplinary team for planning and decision making and the use of multiple sources of data. A comprehensive discussion of the revised Iowa definition of behavioral disorders has been presented elsewhere (Wood, Smith, & Grimes, 1985).

Iowa's attempt to differentiate diagnostically between students characterized as chronically disruptive and those considered to have emotional disabilities had as its principal objective the provision of better special education services for both groups. The exclusion of students labeled chronically disruptive from special education programs and services was never contemplated. The decision to abandon the plan for differential diagnosis and programming resulted from a perception that the effort expended to make the differential diagnosis was not balanced by substantial improvements in programming to meet student needs.

Critics of broad definitions of emotional and behavioral disorders, such as the current Iowa definition, express concerns that such definitions will encourage a massive increase in the number of students identified as in need of special education. This has not occurred in Iowa. In fact, the rate of increase in identification of such students has actually decreased since the adoption of this term and subsequent definition changes.

The major contributor to this section was Carl R. Smith.

## 7. State Policy: Nevada

***Nevada differentiates between "serious emotional handicap"—students who are provided with special education under P.L. 94-142—and "conduct disorder or social maladjustment"—students who are excluded from special education services.***

Other states have continued with efforts to differentiate students with emotional and behavioral disorders into subgroups. In some states, such as Nevada, this effort takes the form of differentiation into two groups, students with emotional disturbance and those with social maladjustment/conduct disorders. Furthermore, in Nevada, recent changes in policy have been based on a narrow and perhaps forced interpretation of the exclusion clause in the federal definition.

The *Report to Congress on Implementation of Education of the Handicapped Act* (10th ed.) (U.S. Office of Education, 1988) indicates that Nevada serves 0.57% of its school-age children (approximately 900) as seriously emotionally disturbed. This is well below the national average of 0.95% and clearly under the national prevalence estimate of 2% of children estimated to need special education because of emotional or behavioral disorders. In the past, students with severe acting-out behavior problems referred to special education were often grouped with students whose primary problems were anxiety/withdrawal disorders or psychosis. While removing difficult-to-manage pupils from the mainstream educational setting, this solution created problems of its own. Combining students with aggressive behavior problems with those who were more anxious, passive, or withdrawn created situations some have described as "mixing the sheep with the wolves." Rather than seeing this as a problem in programming, some special educators in Nevada viewed it as the result of providing special services to students (those with conduct disorders or social maladjustment) who were expressly excluded by language in the present federal definition. For example, Kelly (1988), a Nevada psychologist and special educator, described combined behaviorally disordered programs as having "minimal therapeutic benefit and maximal intimidation and fear for both special class teachers and the legitimately handicapped; . . . excusing or condoning of on-campus felonies through spurious 'handicapped' designations; [and contributing to] . . . soaring teacher burnout and attrition rates, etc." (p. 2).

Nevada's response to these problems was to modify the state definition of serious emotional disabilities in an attempt to differentiate more clearly between eligible and ineligible groups, excluding students ex-

hibiting severe behavior problems without obvious emotional disturbance. Finalized in 1988, Nevada's definition reads:

> "Serious emotional handicap" means a severe emotional disorder, including schizophrenia or autism, or a condition characterized by internal problems, difficulty in maintaining meaningful contact with reality, or bizarre or self-destructive behavior. The term does not include a conduct disorder or social maladjustment unless it is accompanied by one or more of the conditions described in this section. (Nevada Department of Education, 1988, p. 3)

To implement this definition, it is necessary to differentiate students with conduct disorders or social maladjustment from those with serious emotional disabilities, defined as those showing schizophrenic, autistic, or psychotic-type behavior. Eligibility is restricted to students showing a small subgroup of the mental disorders classified in *DSM-III*.

Although students with social maladjustment/conduct disorders are excluded from special education services by these regulations, to date Nevada Department of Education documents provide general definitions but very little guidance for differential diagnosis of this population. The definition provided in the *Nevada Administrative Code for Special Education Programs* (Nevada Department of Education, 1988) states: "'socially maladjusted' and 'conduct disordered' mean behavior characterized by knowledge of social expectations and intentional disregard of those expectations" (p. 33). Earlier drafts of Nevada's regulations, however, as well as documents widely disseminated during the process of adoption of the regulations, defined conduct disorders at greater length. Descriptors given of students with social maladjustment or conduct disorders include:

- They do not assume responsibility for their behavior or its consequences.
- They perceive themselves as normal with the right to behave as they do.
- They are disruptive to other students and teachers.
- They are discourteous or disrespectful, using profanity and verbal aggression.
- They are destructive.
- They have negative feelings about school, are uncooperative in school activities, and test school rules to extreme limits.
- They fight with others with little provocation.

Discussions with school psychologists and other professionals around the state, however, reveal variation in the interpretation of these general characteristics. Some districts are equating social maladjustment/conduct disorders with the *DSM–III* classifications of Conduct Disorder and Oppositional Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 1987). Other districts prefer to use guidelines and procedures, described by Kelly (1988), that use the term *conduct problems* for the behavior of students to be excluded, thus avoiding use of terminology from *DSM–III* or another exhaustive classification of mental disorders.

In the absence of clear state guidelines, procedures used to distinguish students with emotional disabilities from those with conduct disorders vary among school districts. Several districts assign teams of professionals to help teachers develop effective strategies for the student within the regular classroom. If significant problems remain after these interventions have been tried, the student is referred for a thorough psychoeducational evaluation by a multidisciplinary team. Full evaluations make use of information collected through a variety of procedures: direct observation of behavior, behavioral rating scales completed by a number of people who know the child, and psychometric and projective tests.

Other districts use a more abbreviated procedure. Students suspected of having an emotional disability are screened by a special education teacher, a guidance counselor, or a school psychologist using one of several instruments to collect data on which an eligibility decision will be based. The most commonly used screening instrument is the *Differential Problem Sorter* (Kelly, 1988), a 63-item, true-false, behavior rating instrument with a 29-item conduct-problem scale and a 34-item emotional-disturbance scale. This instrument was developed solely for the purpose of assisting in the differentiation of students with conduct disorders and those with emotional disabilities. If, on the basis of this screening, there is an indication of emotional disturbance, a full evaluation is performed. If, however, the screening instruments indicate a conduct disorder, the student is considered ineligible for special education service, no further evaluation is conducted, and the student may be referred to an alternative regular education program if one exists in the district. If no alternative program exists, no special services are provided. Local districts are required to report the numbers of students found to be ineligible for special education services due to conduct disorders following such a full psychoeducational evaluation to the State Department of Education. From July 1988 to May 1989, districts reported that a total of 58 students were so identified.

Students with emotional disabilities who were provided special education services before the change in regulation are re-evaluated and measured against the new standards. The *Differential Problem Sorter* and other behavioral rating scales are used for this purpose within the

context of a full psychoeducational evaluation. If these students are found to have a conduct disorder without emotional disturbance, students already enrolled in special education programs are not abruptly denied services. In an agreement made with the State Department of Education, school districts are allowing these students to continue in programs for students with emotional disabilities as long as needed. Monitoring figures provided to the state indicate that, statewide, only four students have had their placements changed due to the diagnosis of "conduct disordered" during the 1988–89 school year, and those changes were made at parental request.

Programs and options for students with conduct disorders vary throughout Nevada. Many of the school systems use a form of child study team to help classroom teachers plan, implement, and evaluate interventions and alternatives for children not meeting with success in the regular classroom. Students are often placed in alternative schools originally designed for students returning to high school after dropping out, or for students who need a slower paced curriculum. Still others receive "homebound" services because they have been excluded from schools or are awaiting decision for placement, for example, students who are coming up for trial on criminal charges. Students with conduct disorders who are in correctional facilities, hospitals, or chemical dependency programs also receive some form of educational services. However, many students with serious acting-out or antisocial behavior, who are not eligible for programs for students with emotional disabilities under the new definition, are unserved at present. If interventions in the regular classroom are not successful, there are few options for helping these students.

Several school districts have sought federal and local resources to develop programs specifically for students with conduct disorders, but only one district has received funding to date. Washoe County School District in northern Nevada has 3-year funding from state-administered federal grant monies for two programs specially designed for students with conduct disorders. Students in Grades 4–6 may be served in the Washoe County Conduct Disorder Program. This program serves an average of nine students at any given time with a full-time teacher, a full-time classroom aide, and a half-time guidance counselor. A six-level behavioral system is used, which ranges from structured, specific restrictions to generalized privileges and responsibilities. Students placed in the lowest levels of the system work on fundamental behavior and social skills. Middle and upper-level students work to increase independent social, academic, and self-monitoring skills. Students who reach the highest levels of the program begin to spend part of the day mainstreamed into regular classrooms. Eventually they may return full time to their home schools. Parents must be involved in the program by participating in observation time, individual counseling, parent educa-

tion, and behavior management training. The approximate range of time students spend in this program is reported to be 6 months to 1 year. Follow-up evaluations of the students who have completed the program indicate high levels of success in their home schools. However, several students did not complete this program due to lack of parental involvement or moving out of the area. One student was found to require placement in a special education program for students with serious emotional disabilities (Washoe County School District, 1989). As an indication of the need for program services, the Conduct Disorder Program staff report that there has been a continuous waiting list of three to six students.

Students with conduct disorders in Grades 7 and 8 may be referred to the Washoe Alternative Middle School. This program enrolls an average of 15 students at any one time. The program is conducted for a shortened school day (12 noon to 3:30 p.m.). Two full-time teachers and two aides deliver all basic subjects to the students in a self-contained classroom setting. Group sessions with a school counselor are held once a week to work on social and interpersonal issues. Through acceptable behavior and academic progress, students earn performance points, which can be used for structured free-time activities, such as physical education, movies, and field trips. Students are told that this is a "last chance" program for them and that failure could result in exclusion from school. Students return to their home schools when they display specific behaviors stated in a "return contract" developed in collaboration with home school administrators.

Most students stay in the Alternative Middle School from the time they are referred until the end of that school year. Because most of the students are in eighth grade, they enroll in a high school after completion of the program. Follow-up at the high school level has indicated that, of those students who could be located, none has been excluded from school for disciplinary reasons. However, several students have experienced academic failure at the high school level.

Both Washoe County programs for students with conduct disorders are reporting good levels of success, but they are available in only one area and lack local funding. As a result, rather than serving as a model for other Nevada school districts, these programs may be dropped or cut back significantly when present supplemental grant funds are exhausted.

The major contributors to this section were Christine O. Cheney and Kristina Sampson (1990).

## 8. General Guidelines

***The general approach favored for working with aggressive students with emotional and behavioral disorders calls for clear structure of expectations for student behavior with rewards for compliance and some degree of punishing consequence for noncompliance.***

As noted earlier, schools have long provided special programming for aggressive students with acting-out behavior and emotional and behavioral disorders. Sabatino (1982) provided a positive appraisal of the overall results of such programming. The book *Alternative Programs for Disruptive Youth*, which he coauthored with Thomas and Sarri (1982), is one source of ideas for effective programs. Another useful source of suggestions for the management and education of such students is Walker's (1979) *The Acting-Out Child.*

The general approach favored for working with aggressive students with emotional and behavioral disorders calls for the establishment of a clear structure of expectations for student behavior with rewards for compliance and mildly to moderately punishing consequences for noncompliance. The use of token or points systems with both reward and response-cost features is common. The most severe punishing procedures used are various forms of timeout, including seclusion timeout. Physical restraint is typically used as a temporary control procedure. Many such programs also include counseling and social skills training components, as illustrated by the examples of non-special education alternative programs. Under these conditions of high external control, most aggressive students with emotional and behavioral disorders make academic and social progress.

However, educators have raised concerns about the failure of the gains achieved to generalize to other situations. For a general discussion of this problem and possible solutions, see Rutherford and Nelson (1988). The most promising solutions involve intensive work with both students and receiving ecosystems (classrooms or other community settings) during the period of transition from more restrictive to less restrictive settings. Programs based on this approach have been described by Siegel (1988) and Fuchs, Fuchs, Fernstrom, and Hohn (in press).

Recently, some researchers have begun to raise questions about whether these highly structured programs with their punitive sanctions for noncompliance are the best program model for aggressive students with emotional and behavioral disorders. They cite such findings as the following as the basis for their reconsideration of the issue: (a) Aggressive children have deficits and distortions in their self-talk (Hollinger, 1987;

Kendall & Braswell, 1985) and inaccurately attribute hostile intent to others when social cues are ambiguous (Dodge, 1986; Dodge & Somberg, 1987; Nasby, Hayden, & DePaulo, 1980), suggesting that dysfunctional cognitive processing may contribute to their antisocial behavior. (b) Aggressive children have case histories of harsh, inconsistent punishment by parents (Forehand, King, Peed, & Yoder, 1975; Patterson, 1982). Besides the direct effects of these punishing environments on the children, the adults are also modeling aggressive behavior as the means to assert power over others. Based on such findings, Sroufe and Fleeson (1986) have argued that aggressive children expect that peers and significant others such as parents and teachers will be unresponsive to their needs and perhaps punitive. They then behave in ways that tend to elicit from others the responses they expect. Erickson and Egeland's work (1987) on aggressive preschool children has led these researchers to suggest that educational programming should contradict rather than confirm these negative expectations of others.

> In an experimental pre-school with a subsample from our study, children's behavior showed improvement when teachers specifically and persistently contradicted the student's expectations about how adults would respond to him/her. For example, teachers made a special effort to stay close to, and become involved with, children who had a family history of avoidant, detached behavior. And they remained calm and consistently supportive of children even in the face of aggressive, acting-out behavior. (p. 165)

Whether supportive interventions in moments of crisis with young, aggressive students with emotional and behavioral disorders will be an effective early intervention has not yet been fully tested. Given the research evidence of differences between the way aggressive and typical students interpret their perceptions of social situations, this approach should receive more attention from educators.

All of the researchers cited would presumably agree that aggressive students with emotional and behavioral disorders require special programming that is positively responsive to their special needs. Blaming these students for their behavior and threatening them with punishment and exclusion from education should not take the place of planning an appropriate education for them.

Some of the material in this section is based on an unpublished paper by Bie (1990).

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